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A COLLEGE COURSE IN INDUSTRIAL ART

SOME time ago Mr. C. R. Clifford, editor of *The Upholsterer*, suggested in an open letter to the Provost of Columbia University that a chair of Decoration should be established at Columbia which would lead to a degree in Industrial Art or Interior Decoration. This proposition has not only been given serious consideration by those in authority at the University but has met with enthusiastic endorsement by manufacturers, makers and others throughout the United States.

In support of the proposition *The Upholsterer* states as follows:

"We doubt if the importance of Industrial Art is fully comprehended.

"Billions of dollars are spent annually in this country in decorating and furnishing our homes. The public is becoming vitally interested, as demonstrated by the fact that the great museums of the United States which but a few years back harbored only the works of the sculptor and painter, are today filled with important collections of furniture and fabrics.

"The Universities do not realize that the annual production of furniture in the United States approximates \$250,000,000; that the annual production of carpets is \$80,000,000; that the annual production of wall-paper is \$15,000,000; and that upholstery goods, window-shades, fixtures and lace curtains run up to over \$55,000,000.

"They do not comprehend the enormous amount of money that is spent every year in imported rugs and tapestries and fine furniture.

"They do not comprehend the grave responsibilities which rest not only upon the decorator but the manufacturer and the importer of the products that enter into the field of interior decoration, and the difficulties with which they contend in their efforts to satisfy a critical public standard.

"We can engage with confidence an architect to build our house because we know that he has authority as expressed by his University degree, but when we decorate the house and furnish it, spending frequently vastly more than is spent on the cost of the building, we have to confide

our money and our hopes in some man that we take on faith.

"The men of wealth who are investing their money through the decorator, need to be safeguarded, as the public is safeguarded by a physician's diploma. There are quacks in the decorative field who are robbing and misguiding the public, and the public realizes it, for innumerable plans are already in operation all over the United States to promote a better knowledge of Art products. State commissions are organized. Settlement workers, Betterment Societies, Art Societies, Lecturers, all catering to the popular demand for a better education, but it is difficult without concentration to get this education.

"We need at least four years of that same concentration that is given by the young man who is qualifying for an engineering course or a course in architecture. We need the influence of some great university, not only for its direct educational value but for its business value, for the name of a great university behind the degree that is given to a young man would command respect.

"Hundreds of books are published upon furnishings, which indicates how eager the public is for the knowledge. The big dry-goods stores all over the United States are looking for the young man that knows. Every decorator, every furniture dealer, rug dealer, wholesaler, retailer and manufacturer would eagerly employ the young man that comes to them from a four-years' course of study. Hundreds of young men who are taking the electrical engineering course or the civil engineering course or the mechanical engineering course at our American universities find quick employment in our great industrial plants, because it is obvious that they are better material to work from than the boy who has had no technical education, and yet the universities continue blind to the situation and year after year project into the maelstrom of competition embryo lawyers and doctors who struggle and starve in their overcrowded professions, and this great field of industrial art is left uncultivated.

"We are convinced that graduates in

the proposed course would find prompt and remunerative employment and that the university that establishes such a course would find it difficult to supply the demand."

Letters endorsing these statements have been written by presidents of associations, principals of schools, leading decorators, educators, manufacturers, importers representing many thousands of people. Here are a few showing the trend of thought:

Gustave M. Fauser, an industrial designer writes:

"As an industrial designer, giving steady employment to about sixty designers in New York and London, I might say that the field for period decorations and decorations in general has never been as large as it is at the present time. While thousands call themselves decorators, the number that are thoroughly conversant with the subject is small indeed. I do not think that I am exaggerating when I say that not one out of 100 decorators has a thorough knowledge of his subject. I am heartily in favor of your idea, and I am certain that the field is large enough and remunerative enough to well pay a graduate for the time he may spend in taking such a course."

The manager of one of the large decorating firms in New York has this to say:

"The establishment of such a course would be of incalculable value not only to the individual student, but to the public at large, for it would have a tremendous influence on furnishings, whether of the modest type for the workman or the mansion for the wealthy. There is a great dearth of 'men who know,' and only by such a course as that you roughly outline can the necessary knowledge be secured. Otherwise it is only a hit-and-miss education gained by experience and this experience is bound to be more or less limited or local, or influenced by particular environment. We wish you every success."

One of the leading furniture men writes:

"I can hardly see why an endorsement of your views is necessary. There is not a thinking man in the trade who will not agree with you. It matters little whether he is making furniture or selling furniture, making lighting fixtures, carpets, draperies

or anything else. An education in any line is valuable, and in this line more than of ordinary business value because it will tend to give dignity to the calling of the decorator who is now frequently regarded with distrust. To me the wonder is that in the realm of education, the universities have not long ago established a chair in Decoration. Call it industrial art or decoration, but some course should be established that would enable a man to specialize in our field of usefulness."

From two other manufacturers have come the following:

"We are only too glad to endorse your ideas regarding a course of interior decoration, and our only hesitation is how we shall endorse it adequately. Only men of the trade are in a position to realize how frequently interior decoration deteriorates into mere commercialism, a fact due not to intent, but found in the circumstances under which such an education is at first fostered. If it could be taken up as a study instead of a mere training, it would have that authority which it now lacks."

"There are a great many manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, decorators and craftsmen who would be relieved beyond measure if some university would undertake the elemental schooling in the field of Industrial Art. It would add to the efficiency of any organization if the young men came to them with some degree of knowledge."

This is very interesting testimony to the effect that the men in the trades are fully awake to the value of art and to the necessity of equipment along this line.

St. Louis is planning a community celebration of the tercentenary of the death of William Shakespeare in the form of a production of "As You Like It," which, it is understood, will be on the same magnificent scale as the pageant in St. Louis given so successfully more than a year ago. The same organization, The Pageant Drama Association, under whose direction the pageant was given, has this Shakespeare celebration in charge, and there is no doubt that it will be equally brilliant and artistic. It will be an outdoor performance and will be participated in by many of the citizens of the city.